

Love, and other malfunctions

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by [Arethereanydamnusernamesleft](#)

Summary

Tony set out to create a flawless person. His creation was kind, good, smart, thoughtful... indistinguishable from a human - Including his creation's capacity for love.

"It's impressive, Tony," Bruce said as he walked up and down Tony's living room, flipping pages on the tablet he held. Tony looked on from his faux relaxed pose on the sofa.

"The way the neural pathways form mimics the human learning process exactly," Bruce said, pausing to bring up the holographic model of the brain Tony had designed.

"But quicker," Tony added.

"How much quicker?"

"36 to 48 hours to reach adult level reasoning and understanding... at a guess," Tony said casually.

"Still too much of a dangerous process though," Bruce said, shaking his head.

Tony ran a hand through his hair, annoyed by Bruce's reasoning. "So's someone getting knocked up and bringing the kid up badly... As long as the right information reaches it during those formative hours, it's fine."

"And what's the right information?"

"Well, not the entirety of the internet, that's for sure!" Tony snapped back.

“Sorry. Sorry, I’m being defensive... This project has been kinda all-consuming recently,” Tony added.

“Look, theoretically, if we’d had this design before Ultron... well... Well, we’ll never know – You know the UN or Shield would never let you create this, right?”

“Vision turned out okay – Worthy to lift Thor’s Hammer!”

“It’ll never happen, Tony!”

Tony looked away.

“Bruce, the idea of this wasn’t to create something superior... just the best of us – something... someone real. If they look human, act human and think human, what’s the difference?”

“It’s too risky, Tony...” Bruce sighed and looked at his friend. “I know you live for this kind of work but it has to be reined in,” Bruce said. Tony could tell Bruce was trying to let him down gently, but this project was just too close to the heart for him.

“Look Bruce, AI’s will continue to be designed and developed whatever we do... trying to stop that now would be like trying to hold back the industrial revolution. And there’s a hell of a lot of people out there that will develop this tech with a lot less morality than I have... We have!”

“You can’t compare this to the Industrial Revolution, Tony! An invention of an assembly line making machine parts is not the same as creating a thinking being. Ultron was dangerous. Vision could have been dangerous too and we’d have never been able to stop him!”

“It’s dangerous for an assembly line to create machine parts if those parts are for guns or tanks or missiles – Trust me, I know this one!”

Bruce sighed and shook his head.

“I know you want to do this right, Tony. I know it burns you that you didn’t master this tech, but you need to let it go... I can’t be a part of you doing this at all.”

Tony sighed and stood up, going to look out of the window over the compound grounds.

“Well, if I can’t convince you then I can’t convince anyone.”

“I’m sorry, Tony.”

Tony looked around to him. “I’ll shelve it... Focus on the other stuff I’ve been putting off. Making the Quinn-Jet space worthy... the medical uses for the nanotech...”

“It’s all good work, Tony,” Bruce said. “Shame for it to be on-hold, especially the medical work.”

“Yeah... Well technically, my new lab assistant has been taking on quite a bit of work in that field.”

“I’ve not seen anyone around?” Bruce said with a questioning frown.

“He’s in my private labs, not the main compound ones. He tends to keep himself to himself.”

“You let someone in your private labs? Now I have to meet him.”

“He’s... young, but gifted. Come on – I’ll show you specs on the space-station building nanotech

too.”

Tony keyed his code into the lab door and held it open for Bruce to follow him.

“Hi Peter – Bad news, I think the A.I. Android project is getting shelved for the moment. Come and meet Bruce.”

Bruce looked across the lab to see a slender frame wrapped in a lab-coat, head bent away from them over a work-bench. Blue-white sparks shot out from around him as he worked in the dim light of Tony’s lab, but when Tony spoke they halted, and a head with welding goggles and a bandanna around his face popped up.

“Mister Stark!” the young man exclaimed, spinning around.

Bruce raised his eyebrows as the young man propped the dark round goggles onto his forehead and pulled the bandanna down around his neck.

While the young man grinned openly at Tony, Bruce looked up and down the Tony’s new assistant... only assistant, he remembered. The guy was certainly Tony’s type but security access to the ones he brought home was usually restricted to the bedroom – certainly not unsupervised in his lab.

“Shelved?” The kid asked, his smile faltering.

“Don’t worry, Kid,” Tony responded.

The kid -and the boy was a kid below beer drinking age - stood holding his welder. His lab coat lay open showing an ‘I survived New York’ T-shirt and he wore bright pink flannelette pyjama bottoms with cartoon cats on them. Not at what Bruce had been expecting when Tony had said ‘assistant’.

“What did I tell you about abusing my coffee machine?” Tony asked the kid.

Peter guiltily looked back at the workbench where there were about eight empty cups sat.

“I was on to something and I just wanted to finish it off, you know?”

“And how long ago was that?” Tony said coming over to the kid and looking over the workbench.

“About an hour ooorrr...” Peter looked at his watch and then up to the clock on the wall. “May be nine hours... I think my internal clock is a little off.”

“You sound as bad as Tony getting caught up in the work,” Bruce commented as Tony looked uncomfortable.

“Peter Parker, this is Doctor Bruce Banner,” Tony introduced.

Peter dropped the welder on the workbench with a clunk and met Bruce’s offered hand.

“Doctor Banner, Wow... Your new paper on single and two-quantum annihilation-in-flight was fascinating.”

“You read it?” Bruce asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Oh yes,” Peter responded, still shaking Bruce’s hand enthusiastically. “My guess was that your breakthrough in combining the channelling technique with single and two-quantum annihilation in

flight to measure electron distributions in a crystal will be foundation work for a similar measurement in bioorganic material?"

Bruce looked over at Tony in astonishment as Peter suddenly seemed to realise he'd been shaking the doctor's hand for an unacceptably long amount of time.

"I told ya," Tony said with a smile.

"Yeah... Yeah, that's the goal... So, err, what are you working on?" Bruce said as Peter eventually let go.

Bruce noticed that his eyes flicked to Tony, who nodded.

"He's got level 12 clearance, and might be of help with the medical nanotech programme," Tony confirmed.

"Right... I was just finishing off the storage compartment with some new casing, but I've been concentrating on a new formula that the nanites would be able to produce inside the body – from just the materials it has access to, or possibly implanted or quickly ingested materials."

"Peter has come up with quite a few formulas, one's a material that can be sprayed or delivered in a stream that has a very high strength..."

"Like a spider's thread, but more advanced," Peter explained. "My current version can hold around thirty tonnes for two hours. I'm thinking of engineering or natural disaster aid purposes at the moment."

"And the one for the medical nanites?" Tony asked, walking over to where opaque gelatinous concoctions slowly bubbled under a fume hood. "Where are you up to after this last stint of coffee and long hours?"

"I was looking at something that used the chemical components of white blood cells but that kinda works against natural healing. The majority of the matter should be taken from the body – and that is after all where healing materials come from. But I need something more structural – we don't after all regrow organs and bone – and if we could it wouldn't be fast. So I'm looking at reutilising waste, and was thinking of the waste the kidney's produce- Urobilin, biliverdin and bilirubin. I'd like only trace elements to be provided externally. I think maybe by an implant, although by digestion might be a good option for mass delivery."

"Mass delivery?"

"One of my case studies is Ebola... If nanotech could attack the Ebola virus, which I know they now can in experimental conditions, both the nanites and their sources of manufacturing can be dispersed into a water supply."

"You could cure whole villages! Towns, cities even!" Bruce said, amazed.

"My current sticking point is a few elements for the rebuild materials..."

"Rebuild?"

"Not so much for the viral stuff, like Ebola or malaria, so Doctor Cho is continuing on the research for that, but cancers or injuries that need the body to be repaired. With end-stage cancers you can't just whip out all the cancerous cells, they'd still form walls and needed parts of organs, so we need to get the nanites to rebuild the bioorganic structures."

“Where the hell did Tony find you?” Bruce asked.

“MIT,” Tony filled in quickly, stepping forward and putting an arm around Peter. “You can’t have him – get your own assistant.”

Peter blushed and looked down.

“Go sleep kid, and shower. You smell like you’ve been in here since Tuesday.”

Peter looked up at Tony guiltily.

“Peter...” Tony asked.

“Okay, okay. Monday night – but you know I don’t sleep much and –”

“OUT! Go to bed! Eat!” Tony said, pointing at the door and giving the young man a push.

“Okay, okay. It was nice meeting you Doctor Banner,” Peter said, holding out his hand again for Bruce.

“And you too! Tony’s letting me stay in the complex again so we should talk more about your work soon. And call me Bruce.”

“That sound fantastic, Doctor Ban- Bruce,” Peter said, giving Tony another look for permission.

As the young man exited Bruce turned to Tony.

“I think he’s actually smarter than you, Tony.”

“He’s smarter than you...” Tony sniped back jokingly as he cleared down Peter’s workbench.

“I gotta admit when I first clapped eyes on him I thought you’d just got yourself a pretty thing for the lab.”

“A pretty thing?” Tony said looking offended.

“Come on, Tony... He’s so your type. I remember that trip to Vegas... He’s young, cute, twinkish, a little dorky... but then he started to speak! How old is he?”

“Eighteen.”

“Thought you said MIT?”

“Graduated early,” Tony responded.

“Well, he’ll have a Nobel Prize by twenty-one if he keeps that up,” Bruce added, looking at the door where the teen had just exited.

-o0o-

“Did I do okay, Mister Stark?”

Peter walked a few paces into the living-room and then paused for Tony’s response, his fingers worrying his thumbnail as he waited.

“Hey, Peter... Yes, you did wonderfully. Come and sit down,” Tony said from the sofa where he clutched a tumbler of whiskey.

“It was very odd meeting someone new,” Peter said, slipping his bare feet under his body as he curled up on the opposite armchair.

Tony smiled. Over the past three months, that had become Peter’s armchair and the piece of furniture no longer looked right without the kid lounging over it in some form.

“You’ve been out on a trip last week, we went sightseeing and shopping; you met plenty of people,” Tony said, tilting his head to the kid.

“Yeah, but only for a very short time each person and the closest I got to being found out then was asking that hot-dog vendor what kind of dog it was made out of!”

Tony laughed at the memory of the old hot dog seller cursing at the kid and shooing him away, while Pete looked confused.

“You did really well and you seemed to like talking to Bruce?” Tony asked.

“Yes. I got a few of the social things wrong... I shook his hand for far too long, but I was so busy thinking about his work and how it might translate to the nanotech for the cancer treatments. I thought maybe if gamma can be-”

“Hey, hey... You’re off the clock. Let your mind rest as well as your body.”

Peter nodded. “I was just excited. I think I convinced him... Did I?”

“Oh, definitely,” Tony responded, smiling. “I’m very proud of you.” Peter beamed at the praise initially but then it dropped into a sad smile.

“But he didn’t want me to be made,” Peter pointed out.

He looked down at his hands and worried his bottom lip in a way that tugged at Tony’s heart-strings.

“He only knows the theory and he doesn’t know what an incredible young man you are... or rather he does, but he doesn’t know who you are yet.”

“An android,” Peter said, picking at his thumb nail in a way Tony would later document in his log of Peter’s human behaviours.

“A person... an exceptional person,” Tony said.

A twitch of a smile appeared back on Peter’s face and he looked shyly up at Tony.

“Come on,” Tony said, putting his legs down off the sofa and making room. “What shall we watch?”

Peter’s smile became a grin and he dashed over, grabbing the remote and flopping himself down next to Tony.

“Mamma Mia again?” Peter asked hopefully.

“No.”

“I think there’s a second one out too...”

“Still no.”

“But I like musicals...”

“Clearly there’s a flaw in your programming,” Tony sighed.

-o0o-

With Bruce back in the compound, Tony was under pressure to keep the reality of Peter’s existence a secret, but this was hard as the scientist found Peter’s work just as enthralling as he did.

With Bruce calling into the lab at all hours to run idea’s past Peter – a responsibility Tony used to have for his colleague – Tony was getting more and more nervous that Peter would slip up somehow.

Scenarios would play out in his mind of Peter using the extra strength and agility he had without thinking, or Peter would show lack of understanding on something a normal eighteen year old know.

Bruce was smart – sooner or later he’d twig.

Other scenarios also played out in his mind – Peter’s bright enthusiastic smile being replaced by worry and fear as Tony explained that Bruce knew and might report them. What would he do in that situation? He’d already given Peter full security access and flight access to the Quinn Jet in case he needed to make an escape, but it wasn’t something he could bare to make plans with Peter for.

The idea of Peter being forced to run had Tony’s stress levels going through the roof and each day was getting worse.

It was this reason that after three weeks back in the compound, Tony had already made two more attempts to convince Bruce that the android project was a good idea. Sadly, both had been met with the same refusal and warning.

And still, as Bruce entered his code into the lab door that morning, already looking around for Peter, Tony decided it was worth another shot.

“Oh, hey Tony. Is Pete about?”

“No, sorry. I kicked him out of here when I came down at 4am – Kid needed a break.”

Bruce nodded. “He does work some crazy hours – wonder where he’s picked that up from?” Bruce said smiling over at Tony.

“Hey, genius doesn’t go by the clock,” Tony snarked back with a smile.

“I had an idea around limiting the radiation delivery for nanotech cancer patients – wanted to run it by him – the use of lead in nanites and how we could protect the body from it.”

“Sounds interesting, but you’ll have to wait until he gets up and has eaten his way through half of Thor’s Pop-tart stash before he’ll be ready for that one,” Tony replied. “Say... while you’re here I have another proposition for you.”

“Oh Tony, not the android project again,” Bruce said shaking his head and grimacing.

“Hear me out. A prototype – a heavily controlled prototype.”

Bruce shook his head and looked at Tony with sudden annoyance.

“Tony! No! Ultron was a prototype! And we thought we had that all under control, right up to the time he broke out with an army of bots and decided to lay waste to a small city in Europe!”

“We won’t make the same mistakes!” Tony tried. He knew he was pleading, he knew he was putting too much emotion into this, but the thought of being without Peter was just unacceptable.

“Tony, I don’t want to hear another word about and if I even get a sense you’re gearing up for this project I swear I’m gonna go to Rogers and Fury,” Bruce said, his voice raising.

“You’d do that? You’d do that to me?” Tony shouted back.

“YES!” Bruce yelled back and Tony stepped back like he’d been struck.

Bruce shook his head and looked pained.

“It’s too risky, Tony. Please just let it go.” And with that, he left the lab.

“Let him go? How can I let him go?” Tony murmured to himself before picking up the navigation component he’d been working on and throwing it against the wall where it smashed irreparably into pieces.

-oOo-

Less than an hour later Peter appeared at the door, but rather than his usual morning wear for the lab which usually consisted of t-shirt and pyjama bottoms he’d slept in, he was dressed in his black jeans and tight black t-shirt Tony had talked him into buying.

He’d also combed his hair to tame the usual chaos of his locks – The kid needed a haircut soon.

Tony looked up and took it all in. On any other morning he’d have been very glad to see Peter like this, but this morning it was all too much of a reminder of what he was in danger of losing.

“You want to go out or something?” Tony asked as he selected a different sized wrench. He’d decided on working on an old engine casing so he could take out a little anger on it without thousands more dollars getting smashed against the wall.

“No... no... I just thought I’d hang out with you,” Peter said uncharacteristically. He’d usually come in the lab, have a nosey of what Tony was working on and then get straight into his own projects.

The distraction of Peter and his unusual behaviour cause the wrench to slip from his hand on a ceased nut and his knuckles smacked painfully into the side of the engine casing, causing Tony to grunt in pain. “Fuck!”

Peter was at his side immediately, his fingers running over Tony’s reddened knuckles.

“Are you okay?” Peter asked, clearly worried. Peter’s concerned response did nothing to ease Tony’s own anxiety so he snatched his hand away.

“I’m fine. I’m just a little fucked-off with everything going wrong today, that’s all.”

“Maybe I can make you feel better,” Peter said and without a syllable more he pulled his own T-shirt over his head, baring his naked torso to Tony.

Before Tony could ask him what the hell he was doing, Peter mashed his lips up against Tony’s mouth in a tragic parody of a kiss and Tony felt Peter’s hand clutch as his clothed groin.

“What the fuck!?” Tony said, pushing Peter away and making the boy stumble.

“I wanted to make you feel good,” Peter said, giving Tony a passable impression of a kicked puppy. “Was I doing it wrong?”

“Fuck. Fuck!” Tony exclaimed, turning away from the teen and gripping his own hair in frustration. He turned back to Peter angrily.

“If all I’ve created is some sort of dumb sex-bot trying to please me, what the hell am I putting on the line here? Just another failed damn project.”

Peter flinched as Tony swiped his equipment off his desk with an angry swipe.

“But Mister Stark...”

“Get out. Get Friday to give you a full assessment. Find out what the hell is wrong with you and fix it!”

After retrieving his shirt from the floor and edging out of the lab, Peter stood outside the lab door, seemingly non responsive.

“Peter, would you like to begin debugging?” Friday sounded out into the corridor.

“Umm?” Peter mumbled, distractedly.

“Peter?”

“I do feel like something is not operating properly... I feel- How do I feel? I don’t understand?”

“Please attend Doctor Cho’s lab where I can scan your cortex,” Friday instructed.

Peter wrapped his shaking arms around himself and suddenly felt cold. It must be coldness, why else would his limbs be trembling?

He was suddenly aware of wetness on his face and looked up at the ceiling, unable to find the source of the liquid and then made a realisation.

“I’m leaking... No... crying. I’ve never cried before. Why?”

“Unknown. The signals I’m receiving from your brain operation does not show a conclusive result. Please proceed to the medical lab.”

Peter stumbled forward.

“My legs don’t seem to work as well and my chest hurts. Wait... not my chest something deeper. My gut? My stomach? No... I don’t know where it hurts but it hurts.”

Peter slowly entered the darkened lab and climbed up to sit on the treatment bed. A beam of light shone slowly across his body.

“There seems to be no physical ailment. Are your mental processes hindered?”

“Yes... I think they are,” Peter said looking at his hands. “Everything seems slowed.”

“You’re still crying,” Friday observed.

"I'm crying because I hurt, though I don't understand what part of me hurts so bad... It is very bad, though. Scan me again." The beam of light progressed across Peter's body.

"Still no physical ailments Peter. Limited research suggests a certain type of human tear creates natural painkiller, called leucine enkephalin. This may be the response to your current sense of pain."

"But if there's no physical injury then I must have a bug or... Tony said he may have failed in my creation."

"We should assess your performance against the project goals," Friday said matter of factly.

"He didn't want me," Peter said, dropping his head again.

"You are crying more. Has the pain increased?" Friday observed.

Peter nodded.

"What causes the pain to increase? Have you identified any correlations?"

"When I think about Mister Stark sending me away..." Peter wrapped his arms around himself again.

"Perhaps your brain is interpreting your failure as pain," Friday theorised.

"The goals of the project were for me to pass as a human." Peter said, sniffing and wiping his wet face.

"The success criteria involved human-like thought patterns, physical behaviour, physiological make-up and the Turing test, but Mister Stark leaves and unanswered question at the end of the file – 'What does it mean to be successfully human?'"

"Is there a set of criteria for those things?"

"There does not seem to be set criteria for any of them, with exception of the Turing test."

"Then how am I to measure if I am successfully human - Human enough for Mister Stark to want me?"

"My findings are inconclusive. However, Maslow put forward a tiered structure of human need which we could measure your success against for the purposes of this assessment."

"Okay..."

"The basic level depicts the physiological needs of a human to be: breathing, food, water, sex, sleep, homeostasis and excretion. You have succeeded in all but one."

"Sex. But I was trying to... I wanted to." Peter defended.

"Your desire to achieve something does not make it attainable, Peter. You may have 'wanted' to breathe or sleep but been unable to. Perhaps this is the basis of your faulty programming," Friday observed. "Or perhaps you need to obtain this category need from another person. All readings show that you would be fully-functional for sexual intercourse."

"I couldn't... wouldn't get sex from elsewhere."

“Explain?”

“I think I love him, Friday.”

“And this inhibits you meeting the basic physiological need of being human with anyone else?”

“Yes. I guess it does.”

“Even if you did manage to achieve that particular goal, the next tiers of Maslow’s triangle are ‘safety’ and then ‘love and belonging’ which again required sexual intimacy,” Friday pointed out. “With your limitations and without reciprocation of that love, you could not complete this tier.”

“So because I love him I cannot pass the first tier because I do not wish to interact with another person in that way, but without the love I have for him I could not experience ‘love and belonging’ which is also a requirement?”

“As Mister Stark has indicated he would not reciprocate that emotion at all, the goals seem unachievable for you.”

“So I’m not a successful human. And my project has failed,” Peter concluded sadly.

“I would concur,” Friday said.

Peter nodded and remained quiet for a while, unable to stop the tears that still tracked down his face.

“Usually Mister Stark salvages any important component parts and then destroys the remains so that the technology does not get into the wrong hands,” Friday eventually said.

“I do have some brain structure he could re-use and he was pleased with my spinal and ocular function,” Peter said numbly.

Peter started crying harder and wiped the wetness away from his sleeve.

“As you are the first of Mister Starks creations to experience emotions in this manner I need to ask you questions for the final project report. However as I am also AI I do not have the appropriate frame of reference.”

“Go ahead,” Peter said.

“What does love feel like?”

“Horrible... It felt wonderful earlier... and while it grew. Scary but wonderful. Now it feels like its drowning me,” Peter sniffed.

“Are you afraid?” Friday asked.

“Yes,” Peter said quietly.

“Of the end of the project? Of your mortality?”

“Yes and no...” Peter considered.

“I don’t want to be inoperative, but if Mister Stark doesn’t want me and I am a failed project... I see no purpose in my existence.”

“What other emotions are you experiencing?”

“Sadness... Regret. Pain - Lots of pain.”

“Pain is not an emotion.”

“This type feels like one,” breathed.

“Report completed,” Friday announced.

“What is the procedure to shut down a project?” Peter asked.

“Report to Section 26 where you will receive further instruction.”

-oOo-

Peter undressed in the cold, flood-lit storage area and folded his clothes neatly into a large crate before looking up at the range of disposal bags to choose from.

He would need a large bag, he considered, as dismantlement before switch-off seemed impractical and quite terrifying. He opted for the largest of the new anti-static bio-contaminant bag from the shelf and paused, he'd just have to curl into it before deactivation.

“Should I note the shelf life of my component parts on the tag, Friday? The spine should last a week but ocular nerves general muscle cell degradation will start immediately, and brain cells within 48 hours.”

“Brain structure has already been mapped as part of the earlier scan. I have noted the crate ID and will inform Mister Stark of salvage time-frames for other components when he is finished in the lab.”

“Oh... Okay,” Peter said trying to clear his vision from the tears. Everything seemed to be in order.

Peter placed the large silver and yellow striped bio-hazard bag inside the crate and opened it up, climbing inside and curling into a sat foetal position.

“Ca- Can you show me a video feed of Mister Stark in the lab?” Peter asked.

“For what purpose?”

“I don't know... I think I just want to see him before I switch-off...”

A wall panel screen lit up with a direct feed to the lab Tony was working in. He was sat on a bench fiddling with what looked like a section of repulsor. Friday switched the camera and zoomed in to provide a better view of Tony's face.

“Thanks Friday,” Peter whispered.

He positioned himself so that his head would automatically curl down into the bag and placed both hands on the nape of his neck, letting fingers search out the buried deactivation switch he knew was tucked into the base of his neck where it met the skull.

With one last glance at the screen, Peter blinked the tears out of his eyes for one last clear image and then pressed hard against the switch at the base of his skull.

Peter's eyes closed and the weight of Peter's hands folded his head down into the bag just as Peter

had planned.

Friday cut off the feed to the screen and switched off the lights in the now empty room.

-o0o-

“Peter!” Tony called out across his suite. He’d been harsh to the kid earlier and needed to make it up to him. A few hours of hammering metal and throwing tech about had calmed him down and he had realised poor Peter deserved an apology.

“Friday? Where’s Peter?”

“Peter is no longer operational.”

“What? Why?” Tony asked with alarm.

“You asked us to debug and assess him. Unfortunately the project was no longer viable.”

“How? Why?”

“Peter had developed the emotion of love - for you, Boss. This rendered him unable to complete the basic physiological needs required to be considered a successful human. As love was not a component or modular set of code that could be removed, and had been set irrevocably into Peter’s neural pathways, we concluded that the project was fundamentally flawed and shut-down the project. A findings report has been filed in your personal projects folder.”

“Shut-down!? Where is he?”

“The project was fully terminated so Peter is de-activated, bagged and crated in Section 26 with the other tech awaiting salvage.”

“No... No... How long has been deactivated?” Tony shouted in panic.

“Four hours and eight minutes,” Friday replied.

“Connect me through to Banner, Now!” Tony shouted as he started to run.

“Tony?” Bruce’s voice answered over the building comms.

“BRUCE! Medical Emergency! I need your help! – Meet me in Section 26!”

“On my way!”

Bruce turned into the corridor as Tony was keying on the access code to the door.

“Tony?” Bruce asked, carrying his med supplies and panting.

“It’s Peter!”

“What happened?”

“I think he’s-” Tony paused as he burst into the large storage space only to find it empty.

“He’s what, Tony? Where is he?” Bruce asked, looking around at the long rows of storage.

“Peter?” Bruce called out.

“He won’t hear you... Friday – Where is he?” Tony called out.

“Crate 19, Row 9, Boss,” Friday said as the room’s fluorescent lighting blinked on.

“What the fuck?” Bruce asked as Tony rushed off to end row of shelving.

Bruce watched as Tony pulled off crate by crate off the shelves, seemingly in desperation. Random parts scattered onto the floor with heavy metallic clunks and Bruce recognised some old parts from Tony’s Legion building days.

“Tony! Tony!” Bruce shouted, needing to understand what was going on.

“Just search the big crates! - No! Wait! HERE!” Tony said, pulling forward a big crate and ripping into a bio-hazard bag.

“What the?” Bruce muttered as Tony exposed a messy mop of brown hair. A second later he saw arms and bare shoulders in grey/blue skin.

“Oh, Pete... Petey,” Tony whimpered, wrapping his arms around the limp form of Peter and lifting him out.

“Oh my god,” Bruce said, dropping to Tony’s side and opening up the bag. He knew with one look of the kid’s skin the young man was dead beyond help, but he felt the need to go through the motions for Tony’s sake if not his own.

“He’s degrading! We have to get him to Cho’s Lab,” Tony gasped, looking up at Bruce with wide, wet eyes.

“He’s what? Tony, Tony... It’s too late. He’s gone. I’m so sorry-”

“No! His brain function will be protected by the electrical insulation fluids, keeping them in stasis. It’s the degradation of his skin and cell structure we need to halt and repair!”

Bruce looked confused for a moment before glancing at the mop of brown hair against Tony’s chest and Tony’s distraught face.

“He’s the android?! Peter is the android? You made him?!” Bruce realised.

“Yes... and we can save him, Bruce – but I need your help.”

“He malfunctioned?”

“No... He’s- he’s killed himself because I’m an asshole. You gotta help me – Please,” Tony begged.

Bruce only paused for a second. “Okay – what do we do?”

“Cho’s lab – the bio-bed. But I don’t know enough about the repairing sequences. I focused on the creation ones.”

“I do. Come on – You get his legs.”

-oOo-

Bruce set the bio-bed to full-cycle and slid the protective panel back over the bio-bed’s control panel and looked up at his friend.

Tony was entirely focused on the boy's face and still looked moments away from breaking down even though the diagnostic scans had confirmed all cell structure to be repairable.

"The cycle time is 4 hours and 47 minutes – Nothing else we can do apart from gather blankets and heat up some milk for the kid."

Tony ran his hand through his hair and nodded.

"You want to tell me what happened?" Bruce asked.

"From the start?"

"Seems like a good place to begin," Bruce said, pulling up a stool beside the bio-bed to show he was expecting the full story.

Tony dropped his head with a sigh and nodded.

"I'd had this idea," Tony began. "It wouldn't leave me alone. I figured were we'd been going wrong is trying to create a fully fledged brain – one that was ready for whatever was uploaded into it," Tony said, beginning to pace.

"Like Jarvis," he continued. "When Vision popped out of one of Cho's earlier bio-beds and bang – he was fully reasoning, fully knowledgeable – and thankfully had downloaded the best of morality, or reasoning, of ethics... But I couldn't shake the thought that morality, reasoning, ethics – they all change with time. Keeping slaves was once acceptable, keeping the vote from black people and women was one considered the right thing to do," Tony went on.

"I've changed my reasoning and morality in the space of a decade – I moved from creating killing machines to clean energy to save the fucking planet. It's a defining human trait to learn, to grow, to try and better ourselves – not just run a program."

"You wanted to create something good," Bruce said with a sigh.

"Yeah... Then with Cho's advances in Biomedical tech, I realised I could create a body for him that would be indistinguishable. He's got better agility and strength from his skeletal and muscular structure and, well you know how smart he is – but he's designed to BE HUMAN. He bleeds, he sweats, he eats, he goes to the toilet... The first time the kid got hiccups it scared the hell out of him," Tony said coming to a halt and looking down at Peter's face. "He came running into the room thinking he was malfunctioning."

"So he knows what he is," Bruce questioned.

"Oh yeah... Remember me saying he had to have the right inputs in his initial learning phase? Well, I did a lot of research... a lot. Everything comes back to honesty – so I was honest with him from minute one."

"How old is he?"

"Nearly 4 months. He was functioning at adult level by hour 35... He learns so fast and he's just so damn... pure."

"So how'd he end up in a bio-hazard bag in the salvage storage?"

"That I've still got to piece together... But I know it's my fault," Tony said, dropping his head.

“After our argument earlier and your threat to report me if I made him-”

“I didn’t know Tony, I would never have-“

“I know, I know... But I was in a shit mood. I’d gone to my lab and started ripping stuff apart like I do when I’m angry and he came in – oblivious.”

Tony paused and looked down again into the bed where Peter was starting to regain some colour as the beams of energy passed over and through him.

“He was wearing clothes I’d bought him – ones I’d told him he looked good in, and he seemed a little off – not that I was paying enough attention – I was still angry. But then the kid came on to me – said he could tell I was feeling bad and wanted to make me feel better...” Tony shook his head. “He basically tried the worst seduction routine I’ve even seen. He basically took off his shirt, tried to kiss me and went to grab my cock.”

“And your reaction?” Bruce prompted when Tony covered his face.

“I pushed the kid away. I was furious. He’d seemed so life-like until then, and all of a sudden he’s acting like some cheap, Japanese sex-robot – wanting to offer himself to his master just to improve my mood... At least that’s what I thought and that’s what I told him when I threw him out of the lab and told him to go to Friday and assess what the fuck was wrong with his programming.”

“Next thing I know,” Tony continued. “It’s a few hours later and I’ve calmed down – I come out looking for him to apologise and Friday tells me-” Tony choked a little on his words. “Tell you what – Friday, explain to Bruce how you explained that Peter had shut himself down because he was no longer viable?”

“Hello Doctor Banner,” Friday greeted. “I explained the findings that Peter was in love with Mister Stark. This rendered him unable to complete the basic physiological need of sex required to be considered a successful human as Mister Stark was unwilling. As love was not a component or modular set of code that could be removed, and had been set irrevocably into Peter’s neural pathways, we concluded that the project was fundamentally flawed and shut-down the project. A findings report is still available in your personal projects folder.”

“Love?” Bruce asked. “He’s capable of love?”

“He processes fear, surprise, embarrassment... Love I’m not sure... It’s not unfeasible.” Tony said.

“Friday do you have security feeds of your interaction with Peter that let you both to the conclusion to shut Peter down?” Bruce asked.

“Yes. Would you like me to allow access, Mister Stark?”

“Yes... Play them,” Tony requested, equally curious.

As Friday played the footage and conversation as Peter exited the lab, Bruce watched captivated – while Tony became increasingly distraught.

“It’s like he’s trying to explain to Friday the sensations of rejection, heartbreak,” Bruce concluded. “And he seems surprised by the tears; He’s not cried before?”

“Not that I’ve seen,” Tony said, approaching the screen. “He’s never had anything to cry about before now. I keep him safe and happy... at least I thought I had.”

Tony then groaned as they listened to him and Friday try and break-down the success criteria for Peter's very existence.

"Friday, for the record – Peter is and has always been a success," Tony corrected – all too late.

"Noted, Sir."

It was Bruce's turn to groan a moment later as the pair on-screen decided on the best way to judge Peter's humanity.

"Maslow? Come on..." he moaned as Friday started listing out the first tier needs.

They then both watched in silence as Peter explained his inability to meet the criteria because Tony didn't return his feelings.

The silence lasted as they watched the conclusion by both android and AI that Peter was a failure, and should be shut down. How the young man answered Friday's questions numbly, describing the pain that love was causing him, but most disturbingly the fear of his own death, but his acceptance of it without Tony returning his feelings.

Tony was already in tears as the footage from the storage section came up.

As they dispassionately discussed the re-utilisation of Peter's body parts and Friday's dismissive tone around informing Tony of the 'shelf-life' of such parts, Bruce thought it best to step in.

"Tony, I think you've seen enough."

"No. I need to watch. I need to know what I did."

"You didn't make him do this," Bruce said as Peter folded his clothes carefully and placed them neatly next to his body-bag. "Please don't watch."

"Ca- Can you show me a video feed of Mister Stark in the lab?" Both Bruce and Tony heard Peter's voice and looked back up to the screen.

"Awww, Hell," Bruce muttered. Partly because of the effect this was having on his friend, but also on the very human-like stutter that came from Peter's mouth.

The silence lasted for a good few minutes after they watched Friday shut down the lighting in the storage section and the video footage end.

Bruce picked up a tablet, seemingly to give Tony some time to process what he'd seen, but eventually he placed the tablet back down and got up. He approached his friend slowly. Tony had his hands interlinked in front of his face, as if in prayer, tears still streaming down his face.

Bruce placed a hand on his shoulder.

"Come on Tony – To my lab... I need to do some testing – this time on you," he said softly.

"I need to stay here with him," Tony said, staring down at Peter's peaceful pale face under the glass of Cho's bio-bed.

"Tony, it's going to be a couple of hours until this finishes and he won't wake up until the bed has completed its restorative cycle... He's okay – He's safe now. Come on. I have a hypothesis and it needs to be tested. I think we both need an answer to this."

-o0o-

"I gotta say, Tony – He's something else..." Bruce said as Tony sat on a stool in Bruce's lab, uninterested in the equipment Bruce was setting up.

"What will you do? You gonna tell Fury?" Tony asked, voice quiet but firm.

Bruce stopped untangling the multi-coloured wires and looked over at Tony.

"Now I know what I know... I'll help you protect him. I get it now... He's special. And while I don't want you making more than one right now, I recognise that he might be the real thing."

Tony nodded, gratefully.

Bruce went back to threading the coloured wires into small adhesive patches.

Tony itched to be back in the room with Peter. "What are you doing, Bruce?"

"Come here. I'll show you," Bruce said, attaching the electrode pads to his own temples and other areas on his skull.

Bruce pressed a few buttons and brought up a holographic image of a brain.

"This is me. Consider me the control subject," he said pointing to his the rotating holographic brain.

"Friday – show general activity. Tony, what do you see?" Bruce asked.

"I don't know – a brain!"

"Look closer – look at the activity."

Tony sighed with annoyance. Awake or not, Tony wanted to be back with Peter.

"Well," he started, wanting to get this over with. "The amygdala is quiet, so is the mid-temporal cortex and areas of the frontal lobe... Did I pass?"

"Full points... Now watch the activity. Friday – display the pictures."

A photograph of Steve Rogers appeared on a large nearby screen and Bruce turned towards it. There was slight activity of recognition in the brain before the picture changed to Sam Wilson. Again Tony saw the flicker of light on the model of the brain showing recognition. Next was Clint Barton and the same occurred. Next up was Natasha and Tony watched as Bruce's brain lit up with flashes of different coloured light to show the activity her image provoked.

Tony glanced at Bruce's face and saw a twitch of a smile before the picture was replaced by Tony himself and he saw the activity in Bruce's brain suddenly subside back to mere recognition.

Bruce reached for the sensors and unstuck them.

"When human-beings are in love, certain parts of the brain go on vacation – they go dormant. It's thought this happen as the amygdala and mid-temporal cortex and areas of the frontal lobe that are affected control things like fear and judgement... So basically love keeps you gaga until you fuck and produce off-spring."

"So you're in love?" Tony asked, already knowing the answer.

“And from the brain activity on recognition, you wanna make a wild guess with who? I’ll give you a clue – It’s not you...”

Tony smiled. “You two together?”

Bruce nodded. “We’re taking it slow, but I know how I feel,” Bruce said, unsticking the last sensor.

He approached Tony. “The question is – how do you feel?”

Tony allowed the sensors to be stuck to his temples without argument but a little trepidation. He had complex emotions when it came to Pete.

“Okay, Friday – Display Tony’s brain... Oh hey, look. You are human,” Bruce joked.

Tony leant forward.

“Do you see what I see?” Bruce asked next.

Tony did of course – a very dormant amygdala, sluggish mid-temporal cortex and areas of the frontal lobe that just seemed darkened with lack of activity.

“Friday – Pull up the second set of photos,” Bruce asked the AI.

Tony looked over at where Steve Rogers appeared on the screen and the expected blink of recognition showed up immediately on the rotating brain hologram. Next up was Rhodey with the same result, then Clint, then Natasha and then his brain lit up like a Christmas tree as a picture of Peter’s smiling face filled the screen.

“I don’t know if it’s that easy... that scientific,” Tony said, looking over at Bruce. “I created him and yeah, it was only 35 hours but I raised him to adulthood. I’m just saying there are different types of love.”

“Friday, bring up a photograph of Maria Stark,” Bruce requested and Tony turned back around.

The blinks of recognition were there but something more, little flashed in totally different areas of the brain.

“Yeah, it’s love. But a totally different kind. There’s no mistaking what you feel for Peter... Now take off those sensors – I need to show you one more thing.”

As Tony peeled the sticky patches from his temples he sighed. “I guess I knew it. I knew it all along,” Tony said, rubbing his eyes. “I create him as perfection. You can only create your own version of perfection...”

Bruce smiled kindly before grabbing a nearby tablet and came to sit by Tony.

“I realised from what Friday said on the footage that she was able to monitor Peter’s brain signals,” Bruce explained, opening up Peter’s brain activity monitor.

“Yes. I put in monitoring so we could track the creation of neural pathways,” Tony explained.

“Well, take a look at this,” he said, handing the tablet to Tony. “What do you see?”

“Well, I’ll be damned,” Tony said with a growing smile, noting the dark areas of amygdala and mid-temporal cortex.

“Friday,” Bruce called out. “Bring up Peter’s brain activity on the left screen. On the right I want you to bring up the footage from the storage area you showed us earlier and time sync the activity to the footage time.”

Bruce approached the screen and swiped his finger to fast forward the footage to where he wanted it. On the left screen Peter’s brain fast-forwarded various flashes of activity until Bruce hit pause.

He turned to Tony. “Friday, Play.”

“Oh... Okay,” Peter voice came from the screen, reshowing the scene as Peter opened up the disposal bag.

Bruce pointed to the brain model. “This lighting up here – this is fear... A human response for fear,” Bruce explained, pointing at a dull green flicker across the amygdala. “Not as active as you would expect from someone about to... Well, we know why it’s dulled.”

After a few more moments while Tony re-watched the torturous footage of Peter climbing into the bio-hazard bag, they heard his voice again.

“Ca- Can you show me a video feed of Mister Stark in the lab?” Peter asked.

“For what purpose?” Came Friday’s response

“I don’t know... I think I just want to see him before I switch-off...”

On screen, the wall panel screen lit up with a direct feed to the lab and to Tony. On the left screen Peter’s brain lit up with flashes of colour and Tony’s heart gave a lurch.

“Thanks Friday,” Peter whispered.

“Friday, Pause,” Bruce instructed and the coloured brilliance of Peter’s brain froze on the screen.

“You love him, Tony - and he loves you... in a way that’s indistinguishable from human love.”

Tony blinked up at his friend.

Bruce gave his friend a moment, watching as Tony choked back tears before adding “I gotta say, this is one of the two weirdest fucking love stories I’ve ever heard, but...” Bruce shrugged.

“One of?” Tony asked, sceptically, raising a brow at his friend.

Bruce paused. “You now Vision and Wanda are close, right? They’re keeping it to themselves mostly, but...”

“Well, I’ll be damned...” Tony said, shaking his head with a small smile.

Bruce slapped his friend on the back and Tony looked up at him. “I’m saying it’s not impossible. You two are not impossible.”

Tony nodded, looking back at the screen where Peter was curled up as waste and ready for death.

“There’s something else I need to do before we fully bring him back on-line. Something that shouldn’t have been there from the start – I could do with a hand to operate on him,” Tony said.

“Operate? What do you need to operate for?” Bruce said, looking confused again.

“To remove his ‘off’ switch,” Tony replied.

-oOo-

Peter felt very lethargic. All his muscles felt lax and worn-out like he’s been on a very long run in the cold but was now warming and surrounded in comfort. He’d once fallen asleep on Tony’s bed while talking to him late at night about a project and he’s awoken with a similar feeling – warmth, comfort, protection.

Peter groaned at the tingling sensation in his fingertips and curled closer to the solid warmth beneath him.

Peter smiled up at Tony’s face with sleepy eyes. They blinked drowsily at him a couple of times and then shot open.

“I’m still operative!” Peter gasped.

“Yeah... No thanks to you or Friday,” Tony responded as Peter tried to take in his surroundings. He seemed to be on the sofa in the living room, laid fully on top of Mister Stark and them both covered in a pile of blankets.

“I’m sorry Mister Stark. I thought I’d shut-down properly,” Peter said reaching for the switch at the base of his skull.

Tony caught his wrist and held it firm.

“It’s not there anymore,” Tony said.

“I don’t understand,” Peter said, looking guilty.

“No... You don’t - because you’re an idiot.”

“I’m sorry, Mister Stark,” Peter said, eyes filling again. “I tried to do what you said but-”

“Kid, just shut up and let me hold you!”

“Oh...” Peter murmured as he was pulled tight against Tony’s chest.

“I’m shaking again... Am I still faulty?” Peter asked. What was happening?

“You’re not faulty. Just cold,” Tony said, tucking the young man in further against him and tucking the blanket up to his ears.

“But I feel warm?”

“I guess it’s like being out in the snow and then coming back inside, your hands feel hot and tingly even if they’re still cold... You were cold for a few hours,” Tony said with an edge of guilt to his voice.

“Your cells had started to degrade by the time I found you, we had to get you in the bio-bed to regenerate them,” Tony explained while Peter snuggled close. Despite not fully understanding the situation or the current environment, Peter was enjoying the closeness to his creator.

“So I did do it right?” Peter questioned, confused.

“NO!” Tony snapped. Peter pulled back with a fright and tensed.

“Sorry,” Peter mumbled, not really sure what he was apologising for.

“Lie back down,” Tony instructed in a much softer voice. “I didn’t mean to be angry with you. It’s me who should be sorry.”

Peter didn’t know what to say to that. Tony’s words just added to his confusion, so he did what he was asked and curled back against Tony’s warm body.

“The bio-bed has fixed your cells, but you’re still warming back up and we can’t do it quickly or it may shock your systems, so blankets and body-heat were prescribed.”

“Prescribed?”

“Yeah. Bruce helped me get you back...”

“He knows?”

“Yeah... He knows everything now.”

“Will he report me? Will I have to be shut-down again by SHIELD or the UN? I now don’t know how I feel about that – You don’t seem to want me shut-down, but if you did I guess I would-”

“For Christ’s sake Peter – Shut Up! No one is shutting you down. Just- Jesus... Just let me hold you.”

“Mister Stark I think you’re leaking,” Peter observed as he felt wetness on his temple. A moment later he let out an “Oh!” of realisation and did as he was bid – He shut up.

Despite to confusion and disorientation, Peter found it terribly easy to fall back asleep in Mister Stark’s arms

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“Hey, Kid.”

Peter’s eyes blinked open and he looked up to where Bruce was leaning over the sofa.

“Ummm. Hi,” Peter said, still clutched in Tony’s grasp and waking the older man with the vibration of his voice.

“I just came to have a quick check on Peter before I head back off to my suite,” Bruce explained to Tony as he woke.

“How you feel?” Bruce asked, turning his attention back to Peter.

The Doctor seemed quite unfazed that he was lying on top of his friend and colleague so Peter decided to ignore that too.

“Umm. Warm now. A little confused about what happened while I was dead-” Peter felt Tony’s grip on him tighten. “While I wasn’t awake,” Peter corrected tactfully.

“Not light headed? Nauseous? Any pain in any extremities?” Bruce asked after a moment.

Peter shook his head.

“Okay, I’ll head off back to my rooms - I’m sure you two have a lot to talk about,” Bruce said,

giving a meaningful look to Tony. He looked back at Peter. "If you have any pain or strange symptoms, or even just want to talk, give me a call," Bruce said and ruffled Peter's hair, which was, admittedly, already stuck up in random directions.

Peter looked upwards into his hairline and Bruce pulled his hand back and awkwardly nodded at them both before leaving.

"He ruffled my hair," Peter said, even more confused than before.

"I think he just wants to look after you," Tony said with a smile and pressed a kiss into Peter's hair. Peter froze, his eyes wide. Had Mister Stark just kissed his hair? What was going on?

"Come on, time to get up... You're lying on my bladder," Tony said, shifting.

"Sorry, Mister Stark," Peter said hastily and scrambled to his feet, finding himself dressed in Hello Kitty pyjamas he didn't remember putting on.

"Hey, easy, easy," Tony responded, holding out a hand just in case Peter felt woozy. "Why don't you go get a warm shower and I'll get us some food made? How does that sound?"

"That sounds great. Thank you, Mister Stark."

"And how about you call me Tony?"

Peter looked in open-mouthed at his creator. "Err, okay, umm Tony."

Tony smiled as Peter scampered off to his room.

-o0o-

When Peter came back out, still towel drying his hair and now in a baggy Stark Industries Tee and Minions PJ bottoms, he stopped dead with a frown.

"Take a seat," Tony offered, pulling out a chair for Peter.

"Where did this table come from?" Peter asked. It hadn't been there when he left for the shower. But here it was, a small table with 2 chairs, white tablecloth and lit candles. All seemingly come out of nowhere.

"Storage. It seemed cosier than the main dining table," Tony said looking over to where the twelve seater modern dining table stood across the room.

"Oh, okay," Peter said, still confused. He hoped the sense of confusion would go soon. If it didn't, perhaps he'd have to tell Doctor Banner about it.

"Just quick cook pasta for dinner I'm afraid, but I put it with that sauce you like."

"Um, thank you," he said as Tony brought over two plates and placed one down in front of him. What was going on? Tony smiled at him over the flickering light of the candle.

"Is something wrong with the lights?" Peter asked looking around as Tony sat down across from him on the small table. "Do you want me to take a look at the fuse panel on the--"

"Lights are fine. Would you like a glass of champagne?" Tony asked, pulling out a bottle from a cooler on the table.

“Oh – Like we tried in that restaurant last month? I liked that. But only one - I don’t want to end up all giggily again,” Peter said, remembering how flushed he’d felt after two glasses.

“I liked you giggily,” Tony said grinning.

Peter smiled and blushed.

“I like you smiling,” Tony said, looking across the table at him with a strange intensity. Peter’s stomach felt flip-floppy – he must be hungrier than he thought.

Peter smiled and twirled his fork into his linguini, wrapping it around until a large ball of pasta and sauce was on his fork before shoving it unceremoniously into his mouth.

Tony continued to talk, a little about Peter’s work, but more about what they should go and do and see in the next couple of days and weeks. Tony seemed very keen to take him out again which was nice, but almost it seemed to the detriment to their research, which Peter wasn’t sure about.

He also wasn’t sure why Tony kept staring at him like he was looking for something in his face. And while it felt nice to have Tony’s attention on him, it began to make him concerned that his cell-regeneration hadn’t worked as well as they said.

Oh no! Was that why Doctor Banner had come to check on him earlier? Peter’s appetite suddenly left him.

“You’re quiet,” Tony said, setting down his fork after Peter set down his.

“Am I okay, Mister Star- Tony?” Peter asked with concern.

“Why? You don’t feel okay? Bruce said to watch out for pain in fingers and toes, dizziness, headache-“

“No, no... It’s just... I keep getting confused about what’s going on and you keep staring at me, and you were talking about doing all these things in the next couple of days despite the work we’re doing like we’re trying to fit things in before something happens and Doctor Banner ruffled my hair... Am I dying?” Peter asked in a rush, bracing himself for the answer.

“Oh Petey, no. You’re fine!” Tony said immediately, getting to his feet. He pulled Peter up away from the table and gave the kid a hug.

“I’m so sorry, I was trying my... God, I’m such an idiot,” Tony laughed to himself and dropped his head in embarrassment as he pulled back.

“I was trying my moves on you – you know... dinner, candlelight, flirting. I thought you deserved a date...” Tony said, motioning to the table.

“I understand dinner, but the lighting is functional and I... flirting? Wait, you were flirting?”

“Clearly not very well,” Tony admitted, still smiling as his actions started to dawn on Peter.

“This was a date? Like a human courtship date?” Peter enquired in bewilderment.

“I admit I sprung it on you – I should have explained,” Tony said with a grimace.

“Explained what? Please Tony. I thought you didn’t- You said you didn’t want- I don’t understand and it’s making me... knotted... and squirmy inside.”

“Anxious? It’s making you anxious?” Tony asked, reaching out and taking one of Peter’s hands in his own.

Peter examined the feeling again. That description did fit the tense, twisting feeling. He nodded.

“Okay. Straight out honesty time again... I’m sorry. So, so sorry I’m going to make it up to you in so many ways for the rest of my life.”

Peter frowned. “For what?”

“Rejecting you when I was angry. I was a total idiot, Pete... I was worried about you getting found out and the stress of that made me lash out at you. I was a jerk. You came to me with everything I wanted and I made you feel like a failure. I’m so sorry.”

“Everything you wanted?” Peter asked weakly, unsure he understood Tony’s words correctly. Tony wanted him after all? It couldn’t be.

“I wanted you to look human and think human... I never fully considered you’d also feel human. It makes sense of course – Your brain is designed to pump out the electronic signals in the same way a human brain pumps out chemicals... I never fully realised that would translate in the same way.

“And while I’m a fool for not realizing what effect you’d have on me, I certainly didn’t expect the effect I had on you.”

“What effect did I have on you?” Peter asked, cautiously.

Tony smiled and with his free hand stroked his fingers down Peter’s cheek. Peter gasped at the contact.

“I set out to create a flawless person... someone kind, good, smart, thoughtful... And I decided to wrap all that in a form I imagined as my very own perfection. And I succeeded beyond my expectations – and yet I can’t take the credit for who you’ve become.

“You’re beautiful and amazing, Peter and in hind-sight, it was impossible for me not to fall in love with you.”

“You love me?” Peter whispered.

“Yeah... I even have scientific results to prove it, but how about you just take my word for it right now?”

“You love me.” It wasn’t a question this time, stronger. Tony smiled.

“I love you,” Tony confirmed, stepping up and boldly pulling Peter towards him by the hips until they were pressed together.

“I love you too,” Peter breathed.

Tony knew that. Of course he knew that, he’d watched the painful confession while the kid was in tears, he’d seen the scientific evidence of Peter’s brain lighting up like a firework display at the sight of him, but hearing it face to face from this beautiful boy’s lips made his heart soar.

“Can I kiss you?” Tony asked.

“I- I did it wrong in the lab. I don’t know how to- I’ve seen it in the movies we’ve watched, I thought that would be enough. What instructions do I need? Is there any guidance availabl-”

“Peter!” Tony said firmly but gently to cut off Peter’s anxious over-analysis.

“Yes?” Peter said, looking up at him with wide eyes and a wrinkled forehead.

“Can I kiss you?” he repeated patiently.

Peter swallowed. “Yes...”

Tony saw Peter’s shoulders relax and despite his clear nervousness his tongue instinctually came out to wet his lips.

‘Instinctually’, Tony thought in wonder.

Tony brought his hands up to cup the young man’s face and slowly, savouring the moment, pressed his lips against Peter’s.

It was clear the kid didn’t know what to do but that didn’t matter because Tony would take care of him. He softly brushed his lips across Peter’s, feeling the boy tremble slightly in his hands and flicked out his tongue to encourage Peter’s mouth to open.

It did and as soon as Tony deepened the kiss Peter let out a little whimper against Tony’s mouth and immediately started to mimic his actions.

The feel of Peter’s tongue sliding inquisitively past his lips provided Tony with a surge of arousal and ran a hand back down Peter’s side and around to his ass to pull him closer.

Peter automatically rolled his hips forward and Tony felt Peter’s erection press against his own.

“Oh, baby. What the hell do you need instructions for?” Tony said, breaking off for a moment and backing Peter up to the nearest wall.

Taking this as a sign that Peter was doing okay by following his instincts, he sank both his hands into Tony’s hair as the older man recaptured his mouth and let his desires guide him.

Tony tasted like champagne and something much more delicious and he found himself fisting Tony’s hair quite violently and grabbing at the man’s shoulders as though that would enable him to kiss Tony harder and deeper.

A breakthrough for the mounting frustration came when Tony grabbed his thighs and lifted him, bringing the pressure of Tony’s erection hard against his own. It seemed entirely natural to lock his ankles behind Tony’s back and rut against him desperately.

Tony was hard, aroused by him. Tony wanted him. Tony was thrusting his hips against his own erection like he wanted to fuck him. Oh god, it was too much – Why were all these nerve endings going wild? What was that curling, grasping feeling inside him and why did he feel like he needed Tony’s touch and kiss more than air or- Oh, oh God.

Peter’s muscles clenched, starting in his groin and seemed to tremor in a wave outwards. He shuddered and pressed hard against Tony.

“Tony, what’s happening? Oh god! Ahhh!”

“Shushhh, shushhh... It’s okay, baby,” Peter heard Tony consoling, petting Peter on the back of the neck while Peter whimpered into Tony’s collar bone. He didn’t quite know how long he’d been in that state but his face was wet and he felt shaky.

He tucked his head into Tony's shoulder and sniffled. "What happened?"

"What happened? Oh, Pete," Tony said, gently letting Peter down to his shaky legs. "You never had an orgasm before?"

"Oh! That was an orgasm? Oh! If I'd have known that I wouldn't have panicked so much," Peter gasped, still holding onto Tony's biceps.

Tony smiled softly and tugged up Peter's chin to kiss him gently.

"Can I take you to bed?" Tony asked, pressing kisses to Peter's jaw.

It broke Tony's heart how astounded Peter looked by that question, but the young man nodded, his eyes betraying his continued surprise at his new situation.

Pulling Peter by the hand he guided him into his bedroom and closed the door behind them before pressing Peter's back to it and indulging in another kiss with the boy.

Tony stripped them both as they kissed and caressed each other, again with Peter taking Tony's lead; he offered no objections as Tony momentarily broke the kiss to pull the shirt over his head.

Tony gently cleaned Peter's release from his body with his own boxers and with their clothes now at their feet, Tony pulled Peter towards the bed. He gently pushed Peter down onto his back amongst the covers of his unmade bed, watching as the young man's eyes roved hungrily over his own body.

Tony already knew every inch of Peter's skin; he knew the length and shape of the cock that was filling quickly against Peter's thigh – after all, he designed it. Yet, with all that familiarity he wanted nothing more than to press his mouth to every part of the boy, to rediscover that perfect body he'd designed in a whole new way.

But firstly he knew he had to correct some of Peter's misconceptions.

He lay down on the bed beside Peter and pulled him into a lazy kiss, before pulling back again and stroking down Peter's cheek with his thumb and Peter explored his chest and shoulders with a look of reverence.

"I need you to know, before we go any further, that it's not sex, or even love, that makes you valid," Tony started. "To think you weren't real or human enough without love or intimacy was wrong. Peter, you're the best person I know..." Tony said, adding on a "Though I'm biased," and a smile as he saw Peter's face soften.

"That said, I do love you. And you need to know I'll still love you if you want to take your time... I was surprised you'd not had an orgasm before, so I don't want to rush you," Tony said, unable to stop himself running hands down Peter's side.

"Why would I want to take my time?" Peter asked, confused.

"Well, you're young and inexperienced and first times can be nerve wracking. I just want you to feel comfortable and not do anything you're not ready for because you think it's something you need to achieve."

"But if I want to? Not just because I think I should, but because you touching me makes me feel good," Peter asked, shyly.

Tony smiled and caressed Peter's face again. "Well, that is the right reason, but we don't have to have sex straight away, I can make you feel good in lots of other ways."

Peter looked thoughtful and then frowned. "I can see why that would help if I was nervous, like you said, but I'm not. I'm not sure why I should be?"

"You shouldn't, baby. I'll look after you whatever you want," Tony promised.

"My knowledge is limited in this area, but I am happy for you to do anything sexual with me you like," Peter said earnestly.

"How limited?" Tony asked, apprehensively.

"Friday has limited me to 'PG-13' rated movies and video that she's not vetted first. I get to see some things she's analysed by only up to 'R-Rating'. She said it's called my safe-search protocol, that I'm not supposed to look at certain things on the internet... So I had to look a lot of things up in medical books, or novels but they are mainly heterosexual."

"That was your first climax... You've never touched yourself? You're cock or ass, I mean – to pleasure yourself?"

"I didn't really know to... The movies I watched and books I read tended to have another person present and the medical books said masturbation started around the age of 11 years... I'm nowhere near that yet."

Tony's ardour had rather flagged with Peter confessing his lack of sexual awareness and the mention of his technical age.

"Okay, get under the covers – we're going to have a quick run-through of the birds and the bees... well, in our case the bees and the bees," Tony said, pulling back the covers properly and coaxing Peter to snuggle down with him.

"Wait – How do you know you like men?" Tony asked, suddenly.

Peter frowned at him. "I like you," he answered honestly.

"But you've only started meeting people... Oh, god. Perhaps you think you're just gay," Tony said, eyes widening. Of all the things he thought he'd fuck up teaching Peter, his sexual education hadn't even occurred to him.

"Tony, even without watching anything explicit, we've watched enough movies to realise I'm more interested in Han than Leia..."

Tony smiled. He recalled when that exact realisation had hit him too. He'd been ten when Star Wars came out, just hitting puberty and couldn't quite grasp why the chick in the long white dress was so interesting when the handsome guy in the tight pants had his own spaceship and was so cool.

"Okay, okay – what do you know, and I'll fill in the rest?" Tony asked.

"Do you really want me to tell you all of it? It's mainly from medical advice and journals, and as for homosexual activities Brokeback Mountain was rated 'R' and Friday let me watch it sooo..."

Tony laughed. "Okay, so you know what goes where," he said relieved, recalling the awkward reach-around scene. "Though I should mention the wearing of cowboy hats and herding of cattle is

not a requirement,” he added, receiving a roll of eyes from Peter.

“And have you any preferences?”

“What do you mean?”

“What you want, what you don’t want, if you do want to have full sex, which way around you’d-“

“Oh, Jake Gyllenhaal! Definitely!” Peter interrupted.

“Sorry?” Tony responded, tilting his head, confused.

“In the movie... Jake Gyllenhaal...” Peter said blushing. “I don’t really know how to say it... Receiving? Taking it up the as-”

“I get it, I get it, but no more pop-culture references,” Tony said laughing, and rolling Peter over onto his back.

Tony was smiling down at him and Peter adored the closeness and weight of Tony’s body pressed against him.

Peter wasn’t sure quite why Tony was so amused by his explanation, but was very glad Tony’s reservations seemed to be quashed.

“God, I love you,” Tony said, running a hand down Peter’s cheek and cupping his jaw.

Tony smiled again at Peter’s awed expression kissed away the moisture that appeared at the outer corner of Peter’s eyes.

Wasting no more time, he pulled Peter into a deep kiss again and pressed his hips forward, now very aware they were skin to skin. Tony could feel Peter’s erection pressing against his stomach and felt a need to satisfy some of his own desires.

Breaking the kiss, Tony ran his mouth down Peter’s neck, hearing the young man moan as he sucked and nibbled. Clearly the kid’s erogenous zones were wired up correctly, but he should test them all, he reasoned.

Shifting down and latching onto the teen’s nipple caused a whimper of his name and hands clutch at his shoulders. He flicked his tongue against the pink nub and pulled back, about to ask if it was pleasurable. The closed eyes, tipped back head and flushed cheeks answered that question for him, so he laved his tongue against the opposite nipple in equal measure. Moving on, he kissed down Peter’s taught, trembling abdominals to where his cock pressed hard against his stomach.

He took a moment to take in the arousing sight of the strained hardness, strings of precome dripping down to Peter’s stomach, but his pause made Peter look down. He looked concerned at the sudden halt in activity.

Tony spoke quickly to allay any fears, “You look so beautiful, Pete.” Before Peter could respond, Tony locked eyes with him and licked a wide stripe from the base of his cock to the top, swirling his tongue around the head to lap up the pre-come. Tony was delighted to discover it tasted just like human precome – Cho’s new Bio-bed had really done a great job synthesising all the appropriate glands.

Peter’s head fell back as he gasped in surprise hands clutched harder at his shoulders. Tony tried to contain his amusement and swallowed Peter’s cock whole.

Peter let out a broken cry of his name and the teen's hands flew to Tony's hair, gripping his head as Peter seemingly didn't know if he should pull away from the overwhelming feeling or push into it.

"You okay, sweetheart?" Tony cooed, licking against Peter's glans.

Peter looked down at him, wide-eyed, red and flustered. "They don't show this in PG-13 movies!"

Tony couldn't help but snigger before going back to work as Peter dropped his head back to the bed with a groan. After a few more minutes of Peter writhing on the bed with his fingers tugging at Tony's hair, Tony decided to move things along.

Pulling away from Peter he leaned over to his bedside cabinet for the lube.

"Why- Why did you stop?" Peter whimpered.

"Just to get some lube. If you still want penetrative sex, that is?"

"Yes, but... it's not self-lubricating?" Peter asked with a frown.

"Ah, no... medical journals probably felt they didn't need to point that out," Tony supposed aloud, settling back on the bed beside Peter.

"Stupid design," Peter retorted.

"You should send a harshly worded letter to whomever's responsible," Tony said with a grin and kissed the boy's nose.

"They probably also didn't mention the preparation for anal sex... I know that damn movie didn't," Tony added. "I'm going to need to press my fingers into you first, with the lube, to make sure it doesn't hurt you. Is that okay?"

"Anything if you put it in your mouth again," Peter asked, giving Tony a serious case of puppy-eyes.

"Greedy boy," Tony said with a smile before slipping back down Peter's body to give his lover exactly what he wanted.

Once Peter was back to writhing on his bed covers, Tony flipped the cap of the lube with his right hand and coated his fingers, letting them warm before bringing them to Peter's body.

Peter stilled with an 'Oh,' as Tony ran his fingertips between his cheeks and over the sensitive entrance to his body. After a little while of teasing him with both his tongue and his fingertips, Tony pulled his mouth from Peter's cock for a moment.

"Let me see your face, baby... I need you to tell me if anything hurts," Tony asked, receiving a nod.

Tony took Peter back in his mouth but kept his eyes on Peter's face as he pressed the tip of the finger inside.

"Oh..." Peter said again, but gave no indication of pain. Tony pushed further and to his surprise Peter opened his legs further and pressed against Tony's hand, pushing the finger deeper.

"You like?" he asked.

"Oh yes... feels very intimate. Will you kiss me? Can you do that and kiss me?" Peter asked.

Tony rushed to rearrange their bodies to accommodate Peter's sweet request as Peter wrapped his arms around Tony's neck as soon as he pressed their lips together. Before long, Tony was pressing a second finger slowly into Peter's body which seemed to go in just as easily as the first. Peter looked at him with total trust and Tony realised Peter had no fear of the act and therefore no reason to tense up.

He kissed Peter deeply and curled his fingers, wanting to make Peter's first time as pleasurable as possible.

"Tony!" Peter gasped, pulling away from the kiss. "That's- That's so good!"

Tony's smugness was back.

"Will it feel this good with you inside me?" Peter asked, panting.

"It will when I angle it right, yes."

"Please, please... Can we now?" Peter begged. With Tony's eager nod and withdrawing fingers Peter sat up.

"What should I do? Should I kneel or lie down or... What will feel best?"

"It might be easier with me behind you, with you on your knees... It feels really good that way too, deep..." Tony offered and Peter was quick to turn over, presenting the alluring view of his pert ass eagerly.

"Jesus," Tony murmured at the sight, stroking his cock with his lubed fingers.

Peter looked over his shoulder with those begging eyes again. "Please," he whimpered.

Unable to deny Peter a moment longer, Tony took his lover by the hips and pressed the head of his cock against Peter's hole and pushed forward slowly. Peter stilled and moaned as the head of his cock pushed inside, but instead of halting, Peter pushed back, letting Tony sink in until he was sheathed in Peter's body entirely.

"Fuck," Tony panted at the heat and tightness of Peter's ass. He leaned over to press his forehead against Peter's shoulder blade. "Oh, Pete you feel so damn good."

"You feel so deep in me, I feel so close to you – God, Tony," Peter gasped, starting to move his hips.

"Oh, yeah," Tony moaned as Peter started to move, joining in the efforts. He played with the angle a little and pulled Peter up to his chest so that his cock brushed tight against the sensitive spot inside him.

Tony was rewarded with a cry and an urgency in the movement of Peter's hips. In this new position, he could reach around Peter's body and caress his chest, stomach and cock, taking hold of it and giving it firm strokes.

Peter wrapped an arm back and reached behind for Tony's neck. He turned his head and pulled Tony into a messy kiss as they fucked. Tony snapping his hips forward harder and harder as Peter's moans and cries grew louder and louder.

The perfection of sensation came to a conclusion all too soon as Peter let out a cry against Tony's mouth and shot his second climax of the night across Tony's hand, his own stomach and the bed.

Instinctively, Tony fucked the boy harder, wrapping his arms around the young man as the boy's body convulsed around him and he was pushed towards his own climax pressed deep inside Peter's body.

When Tony finally stopped shuddering, Peter was still pressing kisses and gentle licks against his mouth so he pulled the teen into another deep kiss which eventually slowed.

Carefully pulling out, Tony lowered them both down to the bed and wrapped the covers around them, seemingly unable to let the boy from his arms.

"I really, really liked that," Peter said, still breathing hard.

"That was pretty damn amazing, yeah. We didn't last long, but damn," Tony said, pressing a kiss against Peter's temple from behind.

"It's supposed to last longer?" Peter asked, concerned.

"Hey, that was perfect and it was our first time and you were amazing – of course we came quickly. We'll last longer with practice," Tony promised.

"We can practice again tonight?" Peter asked, turning his head to look at Tony hopefully.

"I don't recall writing 'insatiable' on your design requirements?" Tony joked, kissing Peter's cheek.

Peter remained looking at him for an answer and Tony smirked. "Yeah, give me half an hour."

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